identities. For example, the cowboy is seen as a cultural symbol most expressive of a western United States culture region.

A culture (or geographic) realm is the merging together of culture regions. Commonly accepted geographic realms include the Anglo-American, Latin American, European, Islamic, sub-Saharan African, Slavic, Sino-Japanese, Southeast Asian, Indic, and Austral-European realms.

Cultural Diffusion

People’s material and nonmaterial creations spread across space and time, moving to new places and being carried through generations. The spread of people’s culture across space is called cultural diffusion. The spread of any phenomenon (such as a disease) across space is called spatial diffusion. There are two categories of diffusion: expansion and relocation.

Expansion Diffusion

In expansion diffusion, the cultural component spreads outward to new places while remaining strong in its original hearth, or place of origin. For example, Islam spread from its hearth area in Saudi Arabia to other areas around and outside of its hearth while remaining strong in Mecca and Medina. There are several forms of expansion diffusion:

- **Stimulus expansion diffusion** occurs when the innovative idea diffuses from its hearth outward, but the original idea is changed by the new adopters. For example, the diffusion of iced tea throughout the southern region of the United States was modified by southerners into “Sweet Tea.” The general concept (iced tea) diffused but was altered by the adopters to fit their sweet-toothed needs.

- **Contagious expansion diffusion** occurs when numerous places or people near the point of origin become adopters (or infected, in the case of a disease). A good example of the effects of contagious expansion diffusion is shown in the spread of tuberculosis from its point of origin (or node) to surrounding people. Another, more cultural example of contagious diffusion might be the spread outward of the Green Hills Grille restaurant from where it started in Nashville to other cities and towns around its point of origin.

- **Hierarchical expansion diffusion** occurs when the diffusion innovation or concept spreads from a place or person of power or high susceptibility to another in a leveled pattern. Hip-hop music diffused in a hierarchical pattern, spreading from a few large inner cities to other large inner cities, and then to smaller inner cities, and finally to more-suburban and rural places. Information often diffuses in a hierarchical pattern. For example, knowledge of the identity of the terrorists behind the September 11 attacks
in 2001 first traveled through the higher levels of the U.S. government to the media and then to the general public.

A. Contagious Diffusion  
B. Hierarchical Diffusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEGEND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Hearth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Important person or place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ No diffusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3. Contagious versus hierarchical diffusion

Relocation Diffusion

Relocation diffusion involves the actual movement of the original adopters from their point of origin, or hearth, to a new place. This movement of the adopters facilitates diffusion. Whereas in expansion diffusion it is the innovation or disease that does the moving, in relocation diffusion the people pick up and move, carrying the innovation or disease (or whatever is spreading) with them to a new place. When the capital of Russia was moved from Saint Petersburg to Moscow after the revolution, the power and prestige of the Russian government moved, through relocation diffusion, to the city of Moscow, leaving Saint Petersburg vacant of that power and prestige. The spread of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s shows the effects of relocation diffusion, as infected individuals moved, perhaps unknowingly, with the virus to a new city and got others sick in their new cities. One form of relocation diffusion is migrant diffusion, in which the innovation spreads and lasts only a brief time in the newly adopting place. The flu often shows migrant patterns of diffusion, spreading to a new place and weakening in that place after already spreading to a new place of infection. Therefore, the original hearth of the innovation (or node of the disease) is sometimes difficult to find because of the fading nature of the diffusing phenomenon's presence in any one place.
Mix of Diffusion Patterns

What you have probably noticed, however, is that many diffusing phenomena spread through a mix of diffusion patterns. For example, HIV/AIDS may have first spread through relocation diffusion, as infected individuals traveled to a new city, carried the virus with them (obviously), and unknowingly infected others in that city. Then those newly infected individuals spread the virus in a more hierarchical pattern, infected others in their most susceptible groups, such as homosexual men, before spreading in larger numbers into the heterosexual communities.

Acculturation, Assimilation, and Transculturation

Diffusion involves two or more cultures coming into contact with each other. This can lead to the exchange and/or adoption of ideas. The process of two cultures adopting each other's traits and becoming more alike is called cultural convergence.

Often when two cultures come into contact with one another, one culture is more dominant than another, possessing either more power or more attractiveness, making its traits more likely to be adopted or maintained than the traits of the less dominant culture. Acculturation occurs when the "weaker" of the two cultures adopts traits from the more dominant culture. Sometimes acculturation leads to assimilation, when the original traits of the weaker culture are completely erased and replaced by the traits of the more dominant culture. For example, immigrants to the United States might adopt elements of U.S. culture through acculturation while maintaining some traits from their original culture. However, if assimilated, the immigrants lose most (if not all) of the original traits they brought with them from their homeland.

A heated debate surrounds the "English as the official language" controversy in America, with many people arguing that forcing immigrants to adopt the English language is a necessary step in creating a unified country and many others arguing that forced acculturation is culturally biased and erosive to the "melting pot" concept of the United States as a "nation of immigrants." Transculturation occurs when two cultures of just about equal power or influence meet and exchange ideas or traits without the domination seen in acculturation and assimilation.

Diffusion often follows an S curve adoption pattern. For example, cell phones were originally purchased by only a small number of people who knew about them and could afford their initially expensive prices. Those people were known as the "early adopters," or innovators. Once more people learned about them and the price met the demand, a much faster rate of adoption developed (the "majority adopter"
stage). During this phase, most of the people who were susceptible (or likely) to be affected by the diffusing phenomenon became adopters.

In the last stage, most people who were likely to buy cell phones bought them (and thus became adopters). The rate of adoption therefore slowed down (note the flattening curve) in the “late adopters” stage. Only the stragglers, the “laggards,” who had not yet bought cell phones purchased them in this final stage. Notice that the adoption rate does not reach 100 percent in the S curve graph. A 100 percent adoption rate would mean, for example, that everyone who could, adopted a cell phone; but surely some people have chosen not to adopt a cell phone, even though they might be able to afford one. A diffusing phenomenon (or disease) rarely reaches 100 percent adoption.

Culture Hearth

Culture hearths are areas where innovations in culture began, such as where agriculture, government, and urbanization originated. Culture hearths were the sources of human civilization. Many hearths invent similar innovations without knowing about each other, a process called independent innovation (or invention). When agricultural innovation occurred in both East Asia and Mesopotamia, it did so without interaction through independent innovation. Ancient culture hearths are believed to have developed in places with the capability of innovation, all near water sources and arable land.